

Congregational Church
Grafton, Vermont

HABS No. VT-23

HABS
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13-GRAFT,
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PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA
District of Vermont

Historic American Buildings Survey
Arthur H. Smith, District Officer
Gryphon Bldg., Rutland, Vt.

HABS
VT.
13. GRAFT.

CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH
Grafton, Windham County, Vermont

OWNER Congregational Church Society

DATE OF ERECTION 1833

ARCHITECT Unknown

BUILDER Unknown

PRESENT CONDITION Building in excellent condition. Chimney at rear not original. Present slate roof not original, however, it is believed that it was originally shingled, because shingles now appear beneath the slate. The rear wall of building is wood, (clapboarded).

NUMBER OF STORIES One

MATERIAL OF CONSTRUCTION

Foundation	Stone
Floors	Wood
Exterior Walls	Brick and Wood
Steeple	Wood
Roof	Slate
Steps	Stone
Pulpit	Wood
Interior Walls	Lath & Plaster, and Wainscoting.

OTHER EXISTING RECORDS We could not learn of any other records of this building. The information used in this history was secured from a booklet entitled, "HISTORY SKETCH, CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH, GRAFTON, VERMONT".

DESCRIPTIVE DATAVT.
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It is difficult now to write any satisfactory history of this church. The records are scanty and the early ones chiefly relate to what are now unimportant and uninteresting matters. Pages are filled ad nauseam with reports of the discipline of members. One would think from reading them that the rule of ecclesiastical discipline in the eighteenth chapter of Matthew was the most obligatory of all the commandments. There is, however, one interesting fact suggested by these reports - that is, that no member of the church appears to have been disciplined because of infidelity to a creed, a fact which may reflect a double credit upon the church, first, that it was easily orthodox, and, second, that purity of life was considered more important than acceptance of a creed.

No permanent settlement was made in this town until 1780, and it was five years later when, the 20th day of June, 1785, this church was organized as the "Church of Christ in Tomlinson." That was the charter name of the town, but the people disliked the name and had it changed at an early day to Grafton. I have heard Captain Caleb Hall, a son of the first minister, say that the new name was bid off at an auction held on the Common for a mug of toddy to each attendant, and that another bid for two mugs of toddy was made by a man who was in a condition that made him an irresponsible bidder. When asked what name he would choose, he replied, "I would name her Bezelborus".

Then there is no record for three years, except of a few baptisms by neighboring ministers. The next was July 15, 1788, when

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the Rev. William Hall, of Salem, N. H., was unanimously chosen as pastor. The town united in the call, the church and town jointly appointed the 5th day of the following November for his ordination. There were six ministers with delegates in the council, representing churches in New Hampshire, Massachusetts and Vermont. The public exercises were held in David Stickney's barn, which stood on land now owned by William Dompier, east of the highway between Mr. Dompier's and Mr. Leonard Parks, where other services of the church were held before a meeting house was built.

The church from the first had to contend with the habit of intemperance, which was well-nigh universal. The ministers drank with the laymen and had liquor at their meetings with each other. I have the impression of hearing or reading that this custom prevailed until 1834, when the Windham County Association abolished it at their meeting held that year in Marlboro. It is not surprising, therefore, to note that one of the first meetings of the church was for the discipline of a charter member overtaken by strong drink.

But to return to the record. In 1790 James Ross and William Stickney were chosen deacons, and it was voted to have four communion seasons each year. There is no mention of a meeting house in the records, but Thompson's Gazetteer says that one was built in 1792. It stood on the common, the moot-hill of Grafton, in the center of the town. I have the impression that this, the first meeting house, had no steeple, and that some

years later a porch, entrance hall and steeple were added to it and the inside of the house refinished, giving it quite a modern appearance. It was a fine building for the time and place, handsomer outside and in than either of the village churches.

In 1799 by-laws were adopted which in substance are still in force. About this time a few members withdrew to unite with the Baptist Church in Chester, which then extended its sphere of influence over the interests of the denomination in several adjoining towns where no church was organized. There is a minute to show that after these withdrawals the church had 57 members, 20 males and 37 females. In 1806 Thaddeus Taylor was chosen deacon to succeed Deacon Ross, an office which he magnified and adorned for many years. The record of 1807 shows a membership of 45, and three years later there were 49, which is the last report before the close of Mr. Hall's Pastorate in 1814.

For twenty-two years Mr. Hall ministered to this church and to the town also, it might be said, as there was no other church or minister here until late in his settlement.

The 17th of February, 1832, Mr. Arms having removed to Windham the church chose Deacon Taylor clerk. That year the church received 30 members, some of whom were among the most helpful it has ever had. Among them were Capt. Barrett and wife, Nathan Wheeler and wife - the merchants of Grafton, whose wives were sisters and Horace Taylor and wife; and that year the Rev. Moses B. Bradford, its greatest minister, was installed. Mr. Arms continued his ministry in Windham several years and then retired

to a farm in Springfield, where he died at a good old age, respected by all who knew him.

A second important event in the pastorate of Mr. Bradford was the removal of the church to the village. This was a result of changes in the town which could not be prevented. The building of the river road between the village and the Pettengill bridge diverted travel from the hill road and the old meeting house was sidetracked. It was used for town meeting some twenty years longer, but that was because there was no place for holding them in the village. The middle town store was closed and nothing was left but the farms and besides a few small dwellings which were soon vacated and torn down.

The removal of the church was violently opposed by people living in the northwest part of the town, and a few never got over it. At first a compromise site for a new meeting house was considered and ground broken for it on the farm of Mr. Dwinell. But this was soon abandoned, for it was plain that the location would satisfy neither party. The inevitable conclusion at last was reached, and a new society was organized in 1833 to build a meeting house in the village and support preaching there. Capt. John Barrett Subscribed \$2000 for building the brick meeting house, which I have understood was about half the cost. And here it is not improper to say that Capt. Barrett continued to be a liberal supporter of the church as long as he lived, paying one fourth of the minister's salary, and after he died members of his family followed his worthy example.

In the latter part of Mr. Bradford's ministry a large number of the church and society went West. It would be interesting to know how many. I remember that when my father was re-elected Sabbath school superintendent one year he called attention to the loss the school had suffered from this cause.

The Rev. Stephen Barton filled an interim of nearly a year very acceptably and then the Rev. Rufus Emerson came in May, 1863, and remained until January, 1867. During his ministry by-laws, an elaborate creed and church covenant were adopted and printed in pamphlet form. At that time the whole membership was 111, resident 83, non-resident 28.

Through contributions which seem almost inspired, we now have a valuable property for so small a town, a good meeting house, a chapel and parsonage buildings, all in good repair and all paid for. In addition to its real property the society has endowment funds, all but one of them given by former members of the Church.

The information used in this history was secured from a booklet entitled, "History Sketch, Congregational Church, Grafton, Vermont". It was written by S. B. Pettengill of Grafton a early supporter of the church. It was printed by the Metcalf Printing & Publishing Co., Inc., Northampton, Mass., in 1929.

Approved by Arthur H. Smith.
District Officer.

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